



SUFFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of the Superintendent

Timothy M. Van Tassel, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Laura Guerrette
Executive Secretary

September 10, 2021

Good evening SPS Parents, Faculty, and Staff:

Although I do not have the opportunity to spend as much time in classrooms as I would like, each chance I have reminds me of the importance of our schools and the wonderful teaching and learning that takes place within them. While joining one of Mrs. Killam's 6th Grade classes yesterday, her explanation of the scientific method and how we make hypotheses had me reflecting on a lot of the decision-making that has taken place throughout this pandemic. Further, how our experiences have helped us to make decisions that serve to improve teaching, learning, and the opportunities we are providing to our students. I would like to thank Mrs. Killam and her students for including me in their lesson, and sharing their curiosity, energy and enthusiasm with me. It is tremendously rewarding to see our students and staff back in our schools and learning such valuable lessons each and every day. Whether participating in our acclaimed band camp during the summer months (accidental omission during our Return-to-School parent presentation on Zoom), or engaging in classroom and extra-curricular activities – there are so many valuable learning opportunities our students can experience while attending the Suffield Public Schools.

There are several important topics that I am including in this communication. The summary information that follows will hopefully address some inquiries we have received over the past week.

COVID-19 Notifications

Please review the attached copy of the [District Communication](#) families will receive if their child was located within a classroom, workspace, bus, or specific location where a case of COVID-19 was confirmed. If you receive the attached letter, it does not mean that your child was identified as a "Close Contact." If it is determined through our contact tracing efforts that your child was a "Close Contact," you will receive a phone call from the school. Therefore, please continue to send your children to school for in-person learning unless you have been called by the school district.

Current Definition of Close Contact:

*In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.
(CDC, August, 5, 2021)*

COVID-19 Positive Case Transparency

Since we have decided to discontinue district-wide communications about COVID-19 cases, the district has developed a [“COVID-19 Data Dashboard - # of New Positive Cases”](#) on our School Model Status webpage. We will make every effort to update this calendar daily.

Quarantine and Isolation

Since the beginning of the school year, we have had several confirmed cases of COVID-19 that have resulted in self-quarantines and self-isolations in our schools. As we have shared with families, we will be implementing the guidance we have received from the CDC, DPH, and CSDE as noted in the mitigation strategies found in the addenda of [Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut’s Plan to Learn and Grow Together](#), as well as, the school year guidance provided by the CSDE in their [“Updated Guidance for the Use of Mitigation Strategies in Connecticut’s PreK–12 Schools.”](#) It is also important to note that the district continues to focus its efforts on in-person learning experiences for the 2021-2022 school year. We will continue to follow the [CSDE Guidance Regarding the Future of Remote Learning in CT Schools](#) and provide access to remote learning only when it is deemed necessary.

In terms of asymptomatic vaccinated students who are identified as close contacts, we have aligned our district’s procedures with the guidance we have received from our health experts. As a result, students that are vaccinated close contacts will be required to attend classroom instruction in-person if they are asymptomatic. We are hopeful that by limiting remote learning to circumstances that require it, we will:

- Provide continuity of learning to our students;
- Maintain consistency in daily school routines;
- Promote positive and healthy habits of mind that are essential for academic, social, and emotional well-being;
- Enable our teachers to plan and focus their instruction on the majority of students who will be attending in-person throughout the year;
- Ensure that students who are required to self-isolate or self-quarantine receive the academic recovery resources they may need while they are unable to experience in-person learning.

It is possible that the CDC and DPH guidance for vaccinated students may change during the school year, and we will update our families if this occurs. In addition, we will be closely monitoring our positive cases, even among vaccinated individuals, to further identify whether transmission occurs within our schools. Our experiences with school transmissions, outbreaks, and staffing levels may also lead to changes in protocols.

In closing, we look forward to a successful year of in-person learning for our students. Let’s all work together to monitor illness at home before sending children to school, implement the strategies we know will reduce the spread of the virus, and work together in partnership so that our students can experience a school year with as few disruptions as possible.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Tim
Timothy M. Van Tassel, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

